

'Infecting minds': US book sent to teachers seeks to sow climate doubt

April 6 2023, by Anuj Chopra, with Roland Lloyd Parry in Paris



Scientists told AFP that Heartland Institute's book for school teachers is packed with misleading claims that poke holes in established climate science.

From crops to corals, a book circulated by a controversial US think tank is riddled with misleading claims about established climate science, in what campaigners slam as a bid to "infect" young minds.

The free-market Heartland Institute drew outrage from campaigners and

educators, but applause from [climate](#) skeptics, when it sent the book to more than 8,000 American school teachers this year "to present facts" it said were ignored or distorted by pundits and the media.

"Climate at a Glance for Teachers and Students," factchecked by AFP, follows another mass book-mailing in 2017, and reflects a push to sow skepticism about [scientific evidence](#) for the human-driven crisis threatening the planet.

"It is outrageous that such propaganda was sent out... with the goal of infecting the minds of children," Susan Joy Hassol, director of the nonprofit group Climate Communication, told AFP.

The glossy, 80-page book appears like a legitimate reference, complete with datasets, graphs and footnotes citing mainstream sources including government and international agencies.

But scientists told AFP it is packed with misleading claims, including sections that imply higher carbon dioxide levels and warming are positive for crops and [coral reefs](#), decrease in snow has been negligible, [sea-level rise](#) is not accelerating and heatwaves have become less severe.



The Heartland Institute's glossy book appears like a legitimate reference, but scientists say it is riddled with misleading claims.

"We stand by the data presented" in the book, its editor and the institute's climate chief H. Sterling Burnett told AFP.

AFP's full fact-check is published at [u.afp.com/i8i7](https://www.afp.com/i8i7).

'Science fiction'

The book's publication follows a surge in climate denialism in the United

States since July 2022, when President Joe Biden secured support for a major climate spending bill.

Biden is pushing Americans to embrace [electric cars](#) and [renewable energy](#), prompting scorn among skeptics who see it as a threat to their lifestyle and values even as research shows that many citizens recognize [climate change](#) is happening.

The think tank's opaque funding has long prompted suspicion among campaigners that it is working in the interest of the fossil fuel industry.

The Heartland Institute, founded in 1984, does not disclose its major backers but said that once, in 2012, it received funding for research from the charity arm of the fossil fuel behemoth Koch Industries.



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It has kept secret information about the 8,000 recipients of the book. When AFP asked for names, Burnett said he had "nothing to do with the mailing" and passed the request over to Heartland's communications director, who did not respond.

"I would bet it's strategically distributed in certain congressional districts of states where they're trying to provide cover for certain politicians to continue to deny or deceive or delay on climate change," said Kate Cell, senior climate campaign manager at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

At least five schools in Wyoming received copies, according to the Cowboy State Daily newspaper. It quoted Heartland's president as saying that they had received "hate mail" from a teacher who dismissed the book as "science fiction."

The 2017 book received a similar frosty response, with one US media photograph showing an envelope returned to the institute with a hand-scrawled note: "Never send us mail AGAIN."

'Very sad'

The scaling down of the mailing—to a fraction of the hundreds of thousands of books it sent out in 2017—may be a "tacit admission" that Heartland's strategy is not effective, said Glenn Branch, deputy director of the National Center for Science Education.



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Science teachers have become "better prepared to teach climate change effectively and tend to be accordingly leery of climate change denial material," Branch told AFP.

As of March, however, the latest book had received overwhelmingly positive ratings on Amazon.

"All grandparents buy one for your grandkids, all teachers got (sic) one for your students. The sky is not falling—get the message out!" wrote one reader.

AFP cannot confirm if the reviewers are independent of the institute.

"It is very sad, to say the least," Jeffrey Grant, an Illinois-based science teacher, said of the latest book.

"I am hoping to use some of their graphs to show my students how not to put together data in support of your scientific explanation," he told AFP.

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